

***2003 WORK PROGRAM***

***ALASKA BLM RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL***



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February 14, 2003

## **SCOPE OF THE COUNCIL**

The Alaska BLM Resource Advisory Council (“RAC” or “Council”) is a chartered 13-member citizen body appointed by the Secretary of the Interior. Council members represent a wide spectrum of public interests across Alaska, including energy/minerals/commercial recreation, conservation/dispersed recreation/historic interests, elected officials, Alaska Natives and the public-at-large.

The Council provides representative citizen counsel and advice to the Secretary concerning the planning and management of public land and resources in Alaska. The Alaska RAC advises the Secretary through the BLM Alaska State Director. Members of the Council serve at the pleasure of the Secretary for two-year terms that may be renewed.

The Council is responsible for developing recommendations for the BLM regarding the preparation, amendment, and implementation of land use plans for the public lands and resources in Alaska. The Alaska RAC provides the BLM with a representative citizen forum with which to receive public input and to analyze various proposals affecting public land and resources. All Alaska RAC meetings are open to the general public and any person may file a statement or appear before the RAC regarding topics on its meeting agenda. The Council meets quarterly, with a field trip generally scheduled during the summer.

The Alaska RAC operates in accord with an Annual Work Program developed by its membership in coordination with the BLM Alaska State Office. The Annual Work Program is reviewed and approved by the Alaska RAC at the beginning of each calendar year. RAC members, the BLM Alaska State Director or the public, propose the individual items included in the Annual Work Program.

## ***2003 WORK PROGRAM***

The BLM Alaska RAC will address the following issues during 2003. However, unanticipated circumstances may occur to cause the RAC to add or subtract issues and/or otherwise influence the priority and attention the RAC may devote to any issues. The issues are listed below as either action items, or ongoing informational items.

Action items contemplate the RAC taking some sort of proactive action during the year (most likely through the passage of a resolution), while informational items are generally ongoing issues where the BLM will keep the RAC informed. However, the Council may amend this work program at any time if it is later determined that informational items should become action items (or vice-versa).

### **I. ACTION ITEMS**

#### **A. RAC Charter Review**

The BLM Alaska RAC Charter was adopted by the Secretary on September 20, 1999 under authority of Section 309 of FLPMA, as amended, 43 U.S.C. 1739. The Charter was renewed by the Secretary on September 20, 2001. The Charter will again come up for review by Bureau and Department officials prior to the next scheduled renewal in the fall of 2003.

It is therefore timely that the RAC conduct its own bi-annual review of the Charter to determine whether changes might be appropriate to enhance the effectiveness of the RAC. The RAC will then make appropriate recommendations to the Secretary prior to renewal and refile of the Charter.

***Action: Review the BLM Alaska RAC Charter and determine if changes are necessary. If so, make specific recommendations to the Secretary to revise the Charter (by 2Q 03).***

## **B. Outdated Federal Land Segregations**

In many areas of Alaska the landscape is covered with federal land withdrawals, many of which were originally reserved for purposes of Native land selections or for possible creation of new federal conservation system units. However, as events unfolded, many of these land segregations were never removed or revoked, even though they no longer serve their original purpose. As a result, the affected land remains segregated and therefore unavailable for activities such as mining, settlement, forestry, etc.

The RAC is interested in working with the BLM to identify outdated land segregations and to prioritize those withdrawals that should be timely processed for revocation and/or amendment. To accomplish this task, the RAC will form an “outdated segregations” work group, consisting of RAC members, BLM staff, state representatives and other parties as needed. The work group will meet to study the issue and will make recommendations for action to the full RAC and BLM Alaska State Director. The Bristol Bay Region should also be examined as a test case area for this exercise.

***Action: Form an Outdated Segregations Working Group and identify and prioritize existing federal land withdrawals in Alaska that should be revoked and/or amended by the BLM because they no longer serve their intended purpose (by 2Q 03).***

## **C. OHV Usage Policy**

Unregulated Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) usage has become a significant issue affecting land and resource health in Alaska. OHV activity in Alaska has expanded exponentially over the past two decades. The advent of advanced OHV technology has enabled public users to access areas heretofore considered inaccessible.

By the late 1970's, the all-terrain vehicle (ATV) had become a significant mode of overland travel in Alaska. The advent of the 4-

wheel drive in 1981 further revolutionized ATV travel. If current trends continue, ATVs may eventually outnumber snowmachines in Alaska.

OHV trails are becoming increasingly ubiquitous throughout most of Alaska. OHV trails now commonly radiate out from most rural communities and from roadside trailheads, landing strips and other points of access. The impacts of on- and off-trail OHV usage to fragile vegetation, wildlife and its habitat, recreationists and cabin owners, have become pronounced in many areas of the state.

This issue has become one of the most significant land and resource management concerns in Alaska. As such, the RAC is interested in working with the BLM to educate the public concerning the impacts of such usage and to evaluate options to better manage and reduce adverse impacts.

***Action: The RAC will appoint an OHV Working group to meet with the BLM and evaluate options using best available science to address this problem. These options may include the adoption of new management regulations, enhanced public education, and the closure of some public lands to OHV usage (by 4Q 03).***

#### **D. Expansion of the Public Recreation Use Cabin System**

The BLM already manages a system of public recreational use cabins in the Steese Conservation Area and the White Mountain National Recreation Area. With Alaska's resident and visitor population increasing, public interest has been expressed in expanding this system, including consideration of public use cabins in new areas where none now exist, possibly including former unauthorized cabins.

Additional areas to be considered for public recreation cabin consideration might include the NPR-A, the Squirrel River, Denali Highway and Dalton Highway corridor and Tanana Flats. It is recognized that this consideration is best undertaken in the context of the BLM's Resource Management Planning process, but should also include working with other agencies on joint public recreational use cabin systems.

It is also recognized that the creation of additional public use cabins will require capital construction funds and an ongoing revenue stream adequate to cover management costs.

***Action: The RAC will work with the BLM through the RMP process to help determine if and where additional areas on BLM land in Alaska might be appropriate for the establishment of public recreational use cabins (by 3Q 03).***

#### **E. Resource Management Planning (RMP)**

The BLM has begun nationally another effort to update existing RMPs or to prepare new RMPs for areas not already covered. In Alaska, this effort has focused upon several areas where no plans currently exist or where existing plans are outdated.

The BLM Alaska RAC Charter specifically provides that the RAC shall develop recommendations for the BLM regarding the preparation, amendment and implementation of land use plans for the public lands and resources within the jurisdiction of the Council (Alaska). This includes the allocation and expenditure of federal funds related to such long-term planning.

Although the RAC has been briefed upon the status of several proposed and ongoing planning efforts in Alaska, the RAC has not yet fulfilled its duties as provided under the Charter. Therefore, the RAC should immediately address this issue and develop recommendations for the BLM concerning its long-term planning efforts.

The Alaska State Office has identified the NW NPR-A, the Ring of Fire RMP, and Eastern Alaska RMP for immediate planning attention. These and other BLM planning efforts, including the Utility Corridor RMP, the Colville River Management Plan, the Southern NPR-A Plan and the Gulkana River Management Plan will be reviewed with the RAC and considered for future action.

***Action: The RAC shall form a RMP Working Group to meet with the BLM and develop draft recommendations regarding the preparation, amendment and implementation of BLM's land use plans in Alaska (by 2Q 03).***

## **II. INFORMATION ITEMS**

### **A. ANCSA 17(b) Easement Identification and Management**

Section 17(b) of ANCSA provided a mechanism for the BLM to consult with the state and reserve public use and access easements across land conveyed to Native corporations. As a result, many easements (either 60 ft. or 25 ft. wide) were reserved in many areas of Alaska. However, most of these easements have never been marked and their location is poorly understood.

Several years ago the RAC passed a resolution asking the BLM to develop a strategy for the long-term management of easements across Native lands. In response the BLM formed an interdisciplinary team that has been working to inventory, mark and manage these easements. The RAC will continue to follow the progress of this effort and will assist the BLM as requested, particularly to help educate users from within the RAC's respective interest groups.

***Status:*** Stay informed about the progress of the BLM 17(b) easement identification and management program and assist where requested (Ongoing).

### **B. Land Conveyance Process**

BLM Alaska is well along in the process of conveying land to the state pursuant to the Alaska Statehood Act and to Alaska Natives pursuant to ANCSA. However, as these entitlements near closure the process becomes increasingly more difficult. The state and the Natives understandably desire to receive only the highest quality remaining lands to fulfill their entitlements. As a result, they often prefer to wait until more is learned about the resource capabilities of the land.

In some areas, state and Native land selections overlap, thereby creating confusion over the identity of the eventual landowners. In

addition, the state and ANCSA corporations are allowed to overselect their land entitlement, meaning that they have generally chosen more land than they are actually entitled to receive. This situation usually creates uncertainty over future land ownership and sometimes complicates BLM's ability to manage areas of land.

The RAC is interested in following the progress of land conveyances to the state and Native corporations and assisting where needed with efforts to resolve conflicts.

***Status:*** Continue to monitor the state and Native land conveyance process and assist the BLM (including public outreach) where requested to help solidify future land ownership patterns (Ongoing).

### **C. Mining Reclamation/Bonding Review**

In recent years it has become increasingly more difficult for miners to obtain the performance bonds for reclamation that are required as a condition of their BLM permits. Surety companies either no longer issue such bonds or the bonding is cost prohibitive. As an interim solution, the BLM and State of Alaska have signed an MOU that allows the state administered "bond pool" to be used by these miners in-lieu of actual performance bonds. However, the MOU is scheduled to expire early next year and a more permanent solution is desired.

The RAC is interested in working with the BLM to evaluate potential options designed to resolve this problem and allow miners to continue to operate, while ensuring that the affected land is properly reclaimed.

***Status:*** The BLM will continue to keep the RAC informed of its progress during the mining reclamation/bonding review (Ongoing).

### **D. Dalton Highway Corridor**

The Utility Corridor RMP is due soon for update. In addition, there are an assortment of related issues in this area that merit the attention of the RAC. These include the new Coldfoot Visitors Center, the Toolik Lake Research Natural Area, proposals for new communication sites, ongoing mineral activity, TAPS integrity, hunting and OHV usage, etc.



***Status:*** The RAC will be briefed on the progress of issues in the Dalton Highway Corridor and may offer input to the BLM.

#### **E. Heli-skiing Policy**

The BLM has developed a draft environmental assessment (EA) for commercially guided helicopter skiing and associated commercial activities in the vicinity of Thompson Pass. This EA responds to requests by commercial operators to conduct commercial events or operations in the area, including commercial heli-skiing. Heli-skiing has become increasingly popular and has also stimulated associated requests for commercial film proposals.

This issue raises a host of significant issues that need to be addressed by the BLM. These include appropriate “limits” or conditions on these activities, the carrying capacity of an area to accommodate such activities, safety, the potential of designating these areas for non-motorized use or as wilderness areas, and the impact of the proposals on wildlife and other recreational users.

The draft EA considers four alternatives that are currently available for public review. Public comments on the draft EA will be accepted through November 29, 2002, with the final Record of Decision (ROD) anticipated sometime thereafter.

The RAC wishes to stay informed and involved with this issue. Many of the interest groups and constituents represented by the RAC have a stake in this issue (Ongoing).

***Status:*** Continue to stay informed on this issue and act as a sounding board for further public interaction (Ongoing).

#### **F. Prescribed Burn Policy**

There are multiple opportunities for prescribed burns to occur on BLM lands throughout Alaska. Handled safely, these prescribed burns enhance watershed health and restore vegetative diversity, reduce the danger of wildfire and provide valuable contributions to wildlife habitat.

It is important, however, that prescribed burns on federal land be conducted in the context of an adopted policy that incorporates public input. This policy should also be consistent with efforts underway nationally to reduce fire hazards and manage the impact of wildfires on communities and the environment.

***Status:*** The RAC will assist the BLM Alaska State Office as requested with efforts to develop and implement a prescribed burn policy (Ongoing).

#### **G. NPR-A Activity**

The RAC will continue to be involved in the development of the NW NPR-A Integrated Resource Plan and related activities. The NPR-A is an area of considerable interest to the RAC. The BLM will continue to regularly brief the RAC on the evolution of the NW NPR-A Plan and will ask for input where appropriate.

***Status:*** The BLM will continue to keep the RAC closely informed concerning all ongoing activities proposed within the NPR-A (Ongoing).

#### **H. Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) Oversight**

The RAC also maintains great interest in the BLM's management and oversight of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS). This includes the current efforts related to the ROW lease renewal as well as ongoing maintenance and safety considerations.

***Status:*** The RAC will be kept closely informed of all BLM activities related to the TAPS (Ongoing).

#### **I. Campbell Tract USFS/BLM Co-Location (SK)**

The Chugach National Forest has approached the BLM about collocating offices at the Campbell Tract and constructing a new office complex on BLM land in close proximity to the existing BLM

Anchorage office facility. This would affect about 80-150 USFS employees and include the Chugach NF Supervisor's Office, State and Private Forestry Office, and/or the Forestry Sciences Lab. The BLM has agreed to consider this request and has initiated public discussion on the issue. The RAC has an interest in this issue and will be updated on the matter as events unfold.

**Status:** The RAC will continue to be updated on this issue by the BLM (Ongoing).

#### **J. Fee Schedule Review**

Given the costs associated with land management and stewardship in Alaska, the RAC is interested in whether the existing BLM fee schedule for recreation and other activities is appropriate. The RAC requests a review and briefing from the BLM concerning this issue, including any suggestions as to how the RAC might assist to assess the issue and make recommendations for future action.

### **III. 2003 RAC Meeting Schedule – Proposed Agenda Items**

<u>Meeting Date</u>	<u>Tentative Agenda Items</u>
February 13-14* (Anchorage)	RAC Charter Review 2003 RAC Work Program 17(b) Easement Update TAPS Renewal Update Outdated Land Segregations Status Report Heli-skiing Update USFS Campbell Tract Co-location Proposal Election of Officers
April 28-29*	Outdated Land Segregations

(Fairbanks)

Mining Reclamation/Bonding  
Land Conveyance Process Update  
OHV Usage Policy  
Resource Management Planning Status  
Prescribed Burn Policy

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July 10-11 Field Trip\*  
(Coldfoot)

Utility Corridor RMP Update  
Coldfoot Visitors Center Presentation  
Mining Reclamation/Bonding Status Report  
NPR-A Update

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October 20-21\*  
(Anchorage)

Mining Reclamation/Bonding  
OHV Usage Policy  
Public Use Cabin Expansion  
Prescribed Burn Policy  
Fee Schedule Review

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- Includes public comment opportunity

**BLM Alaska  
Resource Advisory Council  
Resolution 03-02**

**2003 RAC Work Program**

*Whereas*, the Alaska BLM Resource Advisory Council (RAC) desires to establish a proactive work plan to guide its activities during 2003; and

*Whereas*, the Alaska RAC also desires advance notice of topics to be considered during each of its quarterly meeting schedule; and

*Whereas*, in the course of performing its business under the approved Charter, the Alaska RAC wishes to direct its attention to timely issues that may be of greatest potential assistance to the BLM; and

*Whereas*, on October 15, 2002 the Alaska RAC created a Work Group consisting of Larry Taylor, David van den Berg, Sandra Key, Charlie Boddy, Steve Simmons and Gary Gustafson to prepare a draft 2003 Work Program for consideration during the RAC's initial meeting in 2003; and

*Whereas*, building upon prior RAC discussions on this issue during 2002, the Work Program Working Group assembled a draft 2003 RAC Work Program that has been forwarded to the entire Alaska RAC for final action (attachment); and

*Whereas*, the attached 2003 RAC Work Program includes a listing of topical action and informational issues that deserve the attention of the RAC during 2003; and

*Whereas*, the Alaska BLM has also reviewed and commented upon the draft 2003 RAC Work Program; and

*Whereas*, the RAC invited and considered public comment on February 13, 2003, to solicit and consider public comments on the draft 2003 RAC Work Program; and

*Now Therefore Be It Resolved* by the BLM Alaska Resource Advisory Council that the attached 2003 BLM Alaska RAC Work Program is hereby approved and adopted.

**CERTIFICATION**

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the BLM Alaska Resource Advisory Council by a vote of 11 in favor, 0 opposed and 2 abstaining or not voting (not present).

Feb. 14, 2003  
Date

/s/ Gary Gustafson  
Chair, BLM Alaska RAC